

A

0  
0  
0  
6  
0  
6  
5  
2  
5  
4

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



A GUIDE TO THE STUDY

OF

*H. H. RICHARDSON'S*

AUSTRALIA FELIX

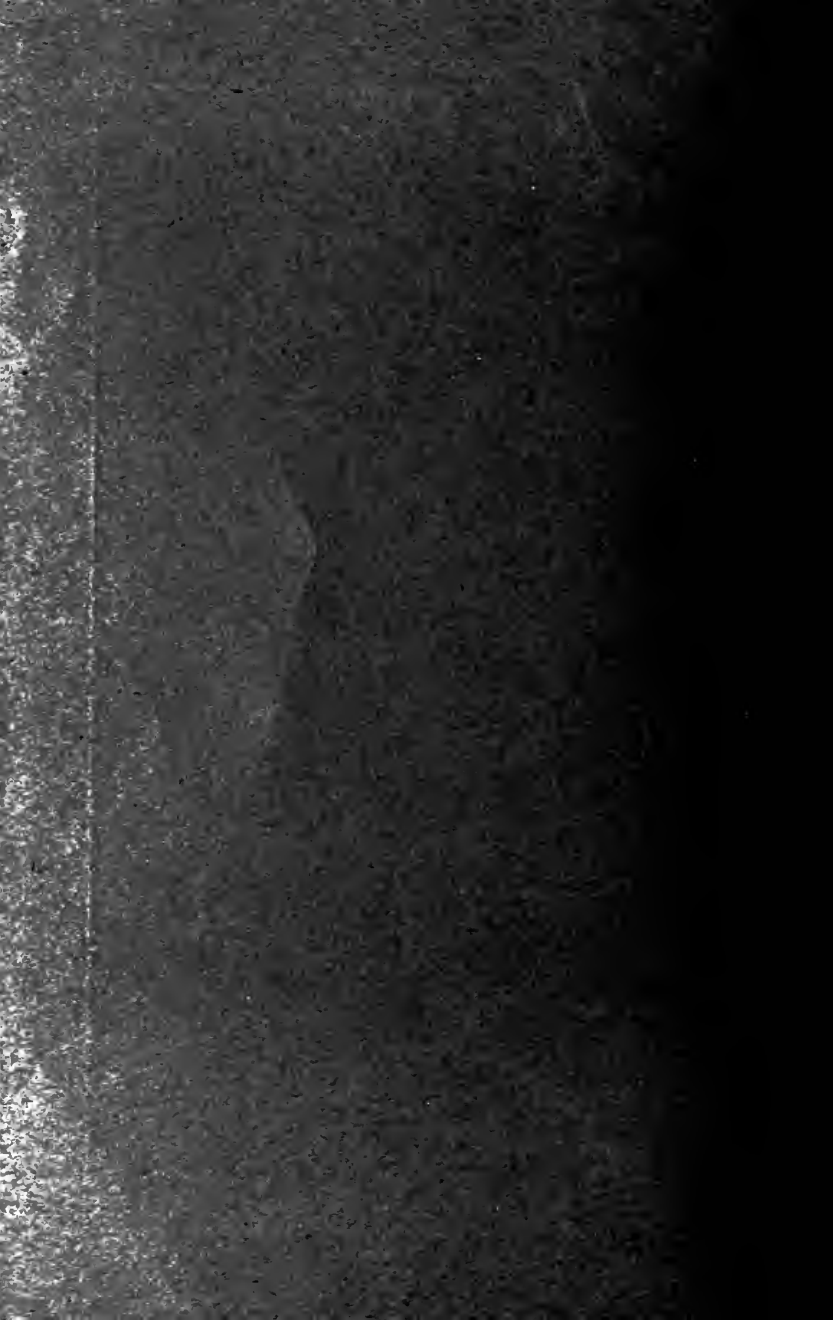
By

MARJORIE BURTON, B.A. (Hons. Eng.), Dip.Ed.

THE COLLEGE PRESS

209A CASTLEREAGH STREET

SYDNEY



UCSB LIBRARY Y45. 1<sup>st</sup> Edn  
X-62257

12.

A GUIDE TO THE STUDY  
OF  
*H. H. RICHARDSON'S*  
**AUSTRALIA FELIX**

By  
MARJORIE BURTON, B.A. (Hons. Eng.), Dip.Ed.

THE COLLEGE PRESS  
209A CASTLEREAGH STREET  
SYDNEY

Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2007 with funding from  
Microsoft Corporation

# C O N T E N T S

Page

Synopsis of the Story    ....    ....    ....    ....    ....    ....    1

General Comments        ....    ....    ....    ....    ....    ....    11

## The Characters

    Richard Mahony        ....    ....    ....    ....    ....    ....    17

    Mary (Polly Turnham) ....    ....    ....    ....    ....    ....    22

## Other Characters

    John Turnham         ....    ...    ....    ....    ....    ....    25

    Henry Ocock    ....    ....    ....    ....    ....    ....    27

    Purdy Smith    ....    ....    ....    ....    ....    ....    27

    Minor Characters    ....    ....    ....    ....    ....    ....    28

Style            ....    ....    ....    ....    ....    ....    ....    30

## Description

    Places    ....    ....    ....    ....    ....    ....    ....    31

    People    ....    ....    ....    ....    ....    ....    ....    35

    Incidents    ....    ....    ....    ....    ....    ....    ....    36

    Imagery        ....    ....    ....    ....    ....    ....    ....    37

Dialogue        ....    ....    ....    ....    ....    ....    ....    37

Exercises        ....    ....    ....    ....    ....    ....    ....    38

# THE

THE

THE

THE

THE

THE

THE

THE

THE

THE

THE

THE

THE

THE

THE

THE

THE

THE

THE

# AUSTRALIA FELIX

## SYNOPSIS OF THE STORY

### PROEM

The book opens with a description of an accident on the Ballarat gold diggings, in which a miner was buried alive, with Long Jim, an English exile, an ex-lamplighter turned miner, mourning for his dead friend, hating the harsh land where he now struggled to live. The hideous landscape of the diggings, the animal-like roughness of the miners, the ugliness of the landscape serve as a fitting introduction to the story of Richard Mahony's fate.

### PART ONE

Immediately following this accident, the Commissioner arrived with a group of mounted police to demand the production of mining licences, and Long Jim, being without one, fled. To divert the attention of the pursuers, his young mate, Purdy Smith, ran off in the opposite direction and was captured by one of the troop as he fell over a pile of tin dishes outside Richard Mahony's store. The storekeeper gave bail for him to be released and so the reader for the first time meets the hero of the book, Richard Mahony, a medical graduate of Edinburgh University, now the keeper of a general store in Ballarat, after a brief unhappy spell as a digger.

The next day the two friends attended a miners' meeting which was being held in a large tent on Bakery Hill to discuss the unpopular licencing tax, and at the meeting Mahony gave a first demonstration of how little he had in common with the miners, in his sentimental speech on what they owed to the British flag. Purdy Smith, who realised that they resented this attitude, showed by his speech that he was in agreement with the rebels against the tax, and Mahony left angrily while Purdy was still talking.

Back at the store Mahony considered his own situation; he was beginning to be restless after fifteen months of keeping the store. Old Ocock, an auctioneer neighbour, brought him news of a threatened summons from an agent in Melbourne for non-payment of goods, which had actually not yet arrived, and Mahony decided to go to Melbourne to straighten the matter out, taking with him an introduction to Henry Ocock, the old man's eldest son, a solicitor there.

Purdy Smith accompanied Mahony on horseback, and as they rode they recalled their childhood together in Dublin, where Mahony first befriended Purdy, the small English boy from a humbler home than his own. Because of this and because he felt responsible for Purdy having come out with him to Australia,

Mahony always tried to ignore the fact that now they had very little in common. Purdy confided to his friend that he wanted a more settled job as he was thinking he might marry Tilly Beamish, whose mother and father kept a family hotel in Geelong. He showed Richard a letter from Tilly which interested his friend because of its unexpected refinement, and then suggested that Mahony, with a view to finding a wife for himself, should go with him to Geelong and look at the girl who lived with Tilly's parents, and jokingly bet him five pounds that he daren't kiss her when they met.

After an unpleasant argument with the merchant who had failed to deliver the goods to his store but was demanding payment, Mahony went to visit Henry Ocock, whom he disliked at sight, but who was an excellent, though crafty, lawyer. Later in the evening he decided to visit Purdy's sweetheart's home to see if she were suitable for the boy, and so the reader is introduced to the Beamish family and to the girl who was living with them, Mary Turnham (Polly), who had actually written Tilly's letter to Purdy. Although she was working for the Beamishes, she had had a much better upbringing and had come from England a short time before, to be near her eldest brother, who lived in Melbourne. When the two young men arrived, the two Beamish girls and Polly ran off and hid in the vegetable garden, where the young men pursued them, and Richard, feeling very stupid because he had first caught Jinny Beamish by accident, tried next to kiss Polly, who repulsed him shyly. He was delighted to discover her delicacy and refinement, so much out of keeping with her surroundings, and her modesty appealed to him so much that he later gave Purdy his money back, as he was ashamed of having made the bet.

When he returned to Ballarat, everything seemed to go wrong; the assistant had robbed the cashbox, the river was flooded, he developed dysentery, and only the thought of Polly gave him any comfort. He began to be conscious of how much he needed a wife and finally decided to write to her, asking her to make him a new store flag. When her return letter came he recognised from the handwriting that she had written all Tilly's letters to Purdy and was delighted to be able to add intelligence to her virtues.

Then he sent Long Jim, who now worked for him, to the diggings to find Polly's young brother, Ned, about whom she was worried. From him Mahony learned many details of the Turnham family, amongst them the eldest brother, John, who was a successful business man in Melbourne, and who was really responsible for his young relations being out in the colony, but apparently did not want them living with him. For Polly's sake, Richard gave Ned money, although he did not like the young man, because of his boastfulness. Soon after this, he suddenly



decided to rejoin Purdy in Geelong, where he announced to Mrs Beamish his intention of asking Polly to marry him. Later he did so, and as Polly secretly thought him a wonderful person, he was accepted.

The following day he journeyed to Melbourne to ask John Turnham's consent to their wedding. Purdy meanwhile had disappeared from his lodgings and gone off on a new gold rush, not as anxious to marry Tilly as he had previously been. In Melbourne Richard visited Henry Ocock, but the solicitor was not available and the clerk hinted that he was engaged with a married lady (Agnes Glendinning) who had come from Ballarat to see him, unknown to her husband. When Richard went on to John Turnham's house in one of the best parts of Melbourne, his reception there was rather cool, and he bitterly resented Polly's brother's questions about his character, prospects, and reasons for coming to Australia, for he was always quick to take offence. At the end of the interview he was introduced to John Turnham's beautiful wife, Emma, with her two small children, and finally received permission to marry Polly.

Back in Ballarat Richard thereupon set to work to improve his simple homestead for Polly's coming, and generously sent Purdy, who was always hard-up, money for clothes, so that he could act as best man at the wedding. He and Polly exchanged many letters in which they discussed their interests, but she would not fix the wedding day, and it was some time before Richard realised that she had no money to buy her trousseau, as the Beamishes had paid her no salary for three months and she was too shy to ask her brother for anything. He immediately sent her some money, realising her brother's meanness, and the wedding day was arranged. Some time later Richard drove with Polly's younger brother, Ned, in a new spring cart to Geelong, and the following day he and Polly were married. John Turnham did not even attend the wedding, his wife's health being the excuse, but sent ten pounds as a gift. Polly's sister, Sarah (later called Sara, and then Zara), who worked as a governess, was there and made a great impression on Purdy Smith, turning his interest away from Tilly Beamish. After the wedding Richard and Mary (Polly) made the journey home to Ballarat in the spring cart through the lonely bush country, Polly growing more and more tired and terrified of the strange, forbidding landscape. They arrived at the diggings in drizzling rain, picking their way up a muddy street, and Polly was horrified at her first sight of the shack that was to be her home. A tarantula spider and the din of welcome made by the kettle-drummers proved too much for her, and she spent the first minutes in her new home dissolved in bitter tears.

## PART TWO

The Crimean War between England and Russia broke out in Europe and badly affected trade, even in Ballarat. There was great agitation for the repeal of the licence tax, which had always been unpopular, and finally it broke out into open rebellion. The miners took all the arms and ammunition from Richard's store; Polly's brother, Ned, and Purdy Smith joined the rebels and at last Richard closed the store. The miners shut themselves into the Eureka Stockade, as troops were rumoured to be on the way from Melbourne. A battle between the soldiers and the diggers was fought during the night, and in the morning, Mahony, after a fruitless search for the two young men, received a secret note from Purdy to say he was wounded and hiding in the bush. Richard rode out into the ranges, where he found Purdy, shot in the ankle accidentally by a fellow miner. He was so angry over Purdy's foolishness that they quarrelled and Purdy taunted him with being just a tradesman. As a result the following day Mahony got out all his old medical books and started to study them, feeling dissatisfied with his store business.

When next he visited the hut to treat Purdy's wound, the young man had gone, but soon afterwards Ned turned up safely, to Polly's delight. Meanwhile Henry Ocock sent a message that the lawsuit was due to be heard and Richard had to write that his chief witness, Purdy, had disappeared. However, he finally set out for Melbourne, taking Johnnie Ocock, old Ocock's younger son, a habitual drunkard, as a substitute witness. The lawyer began to coach his young brother in the evidence he was to give, in a way of which Richard did not approve, feeling that much of it was false. Later, when Richard left his hotel to post a letter, forgetting that he had been warned not to let Johnnie out of his sight, the boy disappeared and was missing when required at the courthouse, to Henry Ocock's great anger. However, the case was finally decided in Richard's favour, largely through a clever legal trick on the part of the lawyer, though Richard was ashamed of the way it had been won and was sorry for his miserable opponent.

Whilst he was waiting for young Johnnie to return to the hotel, Richard called on John Turnham, who was now a warm supporter of the miners' cause, thinking that such an attitude might eventually help him to get political power. Johnnie was found at last, dead drunk, and on their return to Ballarat was horse-whipped by his old father for having robbed his till. Richard by now was thoroughly disgusted by the whole affair and ashamed of having employed a man like Henry Ocock, whom even John Turnham despised. He took refuge from these feelings by spending the early weeks of their married life trying

to educate Polly into sharing his interest in books, but in this he was not successful, as she was entirely practical in her outlook and had not his intellectual capacity.

Business became poor, partly because he neglected it and partly because the miners were angry with him for not supporting them in the rebellion, and so no longer brought him their custom. There were many bad debts which remained unpaid, and in the end Richard made up his mind that as soon as their expected baby was old enough to travel, it would be better if they returned to England and bought a medical practice there. He was beginning to feel that his talents were wasted in his present life. Polly wrote to Mrs Beamish, asking her to come and help at the baby's birth, and heard from Tilly that Purdy's leg was permanently shortened by his wound, and that he still had not asked her to marry him. Polly now hoped that she might be able to persuade Richard to become a doctor in Ballarat, instead of returning to England.

Meanwhile they received a letter from her sister, Sarah, saying that John's wife had died as a result of a carriage accident that had brought on a premature confinement, and John had become almost mad with grief, even hating his children for being alive when their mother was dead. Mahony, though disapproving of John's behaviour, set out for Melbourne, where he found Sarah almost hysterical, completely unable to deal with the situation. He took charge, ordered Sarah to go out and buy food, and tried to force John to regain his self-control by offering to take the children and Sarah back to Ballarat, so that he could go away somewhere and recover. As John offered him no money, he had to go to Henry Ocock, the only other person he knew there, to borrow a sufficient amount of money to pay all the fares to Ballarat, including that of Jerry, Polly's youngest brother, just arrived from England to seek his fortune in Australia.

On their return Polly managed somehow to accommodate the unexpected party of four, though the house was much too small, but she felt that Richard had been thoughtless and inconsiderate to bring them so impulsively. He grew constantly irritated with Sarah's affectations, and the children, who were very badly trained, caused Polly a great deal of trouble.

In the end, Sarah, angry because Richard had made fun of her for stupidly changing her name to Sara, made a broken denture the excuse to return to Melbourne, selfishly leaving Polly burdened with the children. When Mrs Beamish arrived for the birth of Polly's baby, they were boarded out. At the confinement, which was a difficult one, the doctor proved so incompetent that Richard, afraid for Polly's life, had to insist on his operating and even had to assist him, after admitting that he was himself a medical graduate.

The baby was born dead, and it was two months before Polly was well enough to travel with Mrs Beamish to Geelong to recuperate, away from the insufferable heat. Left alone, bored with the store and its dwindling business, Richard began to study his medical books again and even to day-dream about returning alone to England, leaving Polly in Melbourne with John, to follow him later. On her return home therefore Polly found the business, through his neglect, in a worse state than ever, and John's children in their foster-home dirty and uncared-for, young Johnnie growing sly and untruthful in addition. Seeing that her husband's heart was set on returning to a medical career, she suggested that he should set up practice in Ballarat, telling him that John would guarantee his debts, if in return they would take entire charge of his two children. Although worried about incurring debts to establish himself, Richard, as always, followed the line of least resistance, and finally agreed.

### PART THREE

The new house was built with money borrowed through Henry Ocock, on John Turnham's security. Hempel, the store assistant, with whom Sara had flirted, departed to seek a better kind of work, and Long Jim, who was full of grumbles about the colony, was given his passage money home to England, with the careless generosity that Richard always showed whenever he had any money.

Mahony now sat in his surgery in the new house, waiting for patients and meanwhile enjoying himself studying books on the scientific view of religion. In his usual way, he completely forgot how important it was to make a success of the new venture, and lost himself in intellectual pastimes that thoroughly depressed him.

The interest on the borrowed money was due in a month and there were still no patients, largely because he made no effort to make contacts in the town. Only when Polly at last drew his attention to their position, did he acknowledge it to himself and begin to worry in a futile sort of way. Johnnie was giving so much trouble that Polly felt she could no longer manage him, and at last, although they were afraid John might be annoyed, they put him on the coach for Melbourne to return him to his father. On the way home Richard was further worried by a notice of land sales in roads close to his, fearing that he might be called on to buy the land their own house stood on, at a price he could not afford.

Then one day Mrs Glendinning, Henry Ocock's friend, from Dandeloo Station outside Ballarat, came to ask the doctor to call at her house to attend to her husband, who, Richard discovered when he arrived there, had delirium tremens from habitual heavy drinking and had corrupted their little nine-year-old son by teaching him the same habit.

Mrs Glendinning, who was a helpless, extremely feminine little creature and lonely because of her unhappy marriage, became friendly with Polly and told her the affection between herself and Henry Ocock was the real reason for his return to set up his office in Ballarat. Through her Polly began to meet people in the town and country and to enjoy her life as the doctor's wife, and Richard's practice also improved, although he was still living up to the top of his income, and was always worried and in debt.

Jerry, Polly's youngest brother, was not happy on the gold diggings and decided to leave his job there, and Ned too was tired of mining, so that Richard found himself constantly supporting them during their frequent visits. Purdy Smith also came often to visit them, out of work and without money, as usual. Sara, now Zara, also arrived between jobs to visit them, and once more began to upset Hempel, whenever he met her at the Mahonys' house. After she departed, Tilly Beamish arrived, fat and vulgar, hoping at last to capture Purdy, but he, who had become a policeman, kept out of her way. Tilly's parents had gone bankrupt some time previously and had written to ask if Richard could lend them money, and this upset him greatly. He did not like them, but was ashamed to refuse, and sent them five pounds which he could not afford. All this company in the house thoroughly disturbed him, because of his love of privacy and quietness, but Polly enjoyed it.

At this time old Ocock's daughter, Amelia, wrote from England to say that, her mother having died at last, she would now join him in Australia and would keep house for him.

In the midst of a great storm, Mahony was called out to attend to the confinement of a countryman's wife whom no other doctor would go to, and when it was all over was rewarded with a gift of fifty pounds from the grateful husband. His rather foolish pride caused him to receive it very ungraciously, but when he recovered from the severe illness he suffered as a result of the strain and exposure, he was glad to be able to repay his quarterly debt with it and then to buy certain mining shares which Henry Ocock had recommended.

About this time John Turnham came to Ballarat to stand as Parliamentary candidate and asked the Mahonys to help him to get votes amongst their friends. Tilly, despairing of ever succeeding in catching the elusive Purdy, had finally agreed to marry the widower, old Ocock, which greatly annoyed Henry, who had hoped to inherit his father's money. He blamed the Mahonys for bringing them together, and for this reason Richard was unable to ask his support for John in the campaign.

However, John made use of Polly to help him in vote-catching amongst her new station friends. He was duly successful at the election, but was accidentally knocked down, and Richard had to attend to him and afterwards take him to their

was delirious, and remained ill for many weeks, during which time Purdy disappeared. All the friends Mary had made rallied to her help, and at last her husband recovered, but the illness marked a turning point in their lives. Mary began to doubt her husband's wisdom when she remembered all that had led up to this point, and from then onwards to look upon him in a maternal, rather than a wifely, way.

Old Ocock, Tilly's husband, was now at death's door, in spite of all her care. Jinny, John's wife, died at the birth of their third daughter, Mary and Tilly making the journey from Ballarat together just in time to see her before she died. Mary agreed to take the baby, if Trottie, John's eldest daughter whom she had brought up, were sent to a boarding school. It was arranged that Zara should come and look after John's house and the other children, in spite of the fact that she and her brother did not get on well together. During this visit, Mary, always anxious to help, went to see Johnnie, John's unsatisfactory eldest child, at Geelong Grammar School. Winning his confidence, she learned that he wanted to go to sea, but his father would not allow him, in spite of the fact that John himself had left home quite young, to come adventuring to Australia.

Soon after Mary arrived home again, Richard, who had been thoroughly depressed and irritable since his illness, tactlessly told Henry Ocock, who preferred to shut his eyes to the truth and to hope that other people were not aware of it, that his wife's illness was due to excessive drinking. Henry was extremely angry with Mahony over this "insult" to his wife. He changed his doctor, and broke off their acquaintance. People began to gossip that Mahony was no good as a doctor, as his successor at the Ocock's gave the verdict that Agnes merely needed a change of air, and Richard's practice before long began to suffer.

He withdrew his shares from Henry Ocock's control and immediately got into difficulties over them. Then his restlessness broke out afresh, and he became utterly despondent, until finally he made up his mind to leave Australia for ever and return to England, if only Mary would agree. The last straw came when, after a blazing summer of drought and bushfires, in which he grew to hate the countryside as much as he already disliked the people, news reached him that he had lost heavily on the failure of some Government stock.

He told Mary that his health was suffering and he could not go on any longer. When she could not believe his intention of throwing up the practice, which was quite lucrative and which she was convinced would improve still further if he were more tactful and sensible, he became angry and they quarrelled violently, Richard breaking into exaggerated accusations against everything Australian — people, conditions and scenery. Mary

knew it was folly but was helpless before his impulsive fury. He had apparently no conception of what such an upheaval would mean to her. When she told Tilly of his foolish decision, Tilly put into words what everyone else thought, that Richard was "mad as a March hare."

Everything was sold, the house and all Mary's beloved household belongings, goodbye parties were given, and they left for Melbourne to stay with John until their ship was ready to sail. Zara was proving to be an incompetent housewife once more, and finally left, after a quarrel with her brother, so that Mary's last task for her family, for whom she had done so much throughout her married life, was to find someone to take her place. At last the ship left the harbour, with all Mary's friends and relations there to bid them farewell, Richard having no friends of his own at all, and they sailed away towards the new life that awaited them in England, Richard full of foolish optimism quite unfounded on fact, and completely oblivious to his wife's sorrow and foreboding.

## GENERAL COMMENTS

Henry Handel Richardson, a doctor's daughter, was born in Melbourne, educated there and in Germany, where she studied music, and after her marriage lived in London until her death in 1946. Although she returned to her native land only on a brief visit, she is considered by many critics to be one of the greatest Australian novelists, largely on account of her famous trilogy, *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*, of which *Australia Felix*, published in 1917, is Volume One.

She had already written two other novels, one set in Leipzig (Germany) about music students such as she had been, and the other about her girlhood in Melbourne, but neither of these had made much stir in the literary world. Nor did *Australia Felix* and the following volume of the trilogy. Only when the third volume of *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* was published in 1929 did she become famous. Neither of the first two volumes gives the impression of being complete in itself. It would undoubtedly have been a good thing if the author had waited to complete all three volumes before publication, but it would certainly have been difficult, as the whole trilogy took fifteen years to write. Many critics rank it with such famous nineteenth century Russian novels as Tolstoi's *Anna Karenina* for its remarkable character study. The author most often compared with Henry Handel Richardson in English literature is George Eliot, also a woman writer, of the nineteenth century, whose books, *Silas Marner*, *The Mill on the Floss* and *Adam Bede* you have most probably read.

Henry Handel Richardson, as her choice of a man's name shows, preferred to be anonymous and avoided literary

was delirious, and remained ill for many weeks, during which time Purdy disappeared. All the friends Mary had made rallied to her help, and at last her husband recovered, but the illness marked a turning point in their lives. Mary began to doubt her husband's wisdom when she remembered all that had led up to this point, and from then onwards to look upon him in a maternal, rather than a wifely, way.

Old Ocock, Tilly's husband, was now at death's door, in spite of all her care. Jinny, John's wife, died at the birth of their third daughter, Mary and Tilly making the journey from Ballarat together just in time to see her before she died. Mary agreed to take the baby, if Trottie, John's eldest daughter whom she had brought up, were sent to a boarding school. It was arranged that Zara should come and look after John's house and the other children, in spite of the fact that she and her brother did not get on well together. During this visit, Mary, always anxious to help, went to see Johnnie, John's unsatisfactory eldest child, at Geelong Grammar School. Winning his confidence, she learned that he wanted to go to sea, but his father would not allow him, in spite of the fact that John himself had left home quite young, to come adventuring to Australia.

Soon after Mary arrived home again, Richard, who had been thoroughly depressed and irritable since his illness, tactlessly told Henry Ocock, who preferred to shut his eyes to the truth and to hope that other people were not aware of it, that his wife's illness was due to excessive drinking. Henry was extremely angry with Mahony over this "insult" to his wife. He changed his doctor, and broke off their acquaintance. People began to gossip that Mahony was no good as a doctor, as his successor at the Ocock's gave the verdict that Agnes merely needed a change of air, and Richard's practice before long began to suffer.

He withdrew his shares from Henry Ocock's control and immediately got into difficulties over them. Then his restlessness broke out afresh, and he became utterly despondent, until finally he made up his mind to leave Australia for ever and return to England, if only Mary would agree. The last straw came when, after a blazing summer of drought and bushfires, in which he grew to hate the countryside as much as he already disliked the people, news reached him that he had lost heavily on the failure of some Government stock.

He told Mary that his health was suffering and he could not go on any longer. When she could not believe his intention of throwing up the practice, which was quite lucrative and which she was convinced would improve still further if he were more tactful and sensible, he became angry and they quarrelled violently, Richard breaking into exaggerated accusations against everything Australian — people, conditions and scenery. Mary



knew it was folly but was helpless before his impulsive fury. He had apparently no conception of what such an upheaval would mean to her. When she told Tilly of his foolish decision, Tilly put into words what everyone else thought, that Richard was "mad as a March hare."

Everything was sold, the house and all Mary's beloved household belongings, goodbye parties were given, and they left for Melbourne to stay with John until their ship was ready to sail. Zara was proving to be an incompetent housewife once more, and finally left, after a quarrel with her brother, so that Mary's last task for her family, for whom she had done so much throughout her married life, was to find someone to take her place. At last the ship left the harbour, with all Mary's friends and relations there to bid them farewell, Richard having no friends of his own at all, and they sailed away towards the new life that awaited them in England, Richard full of foolish optimism quite unfounded on fact, and completely oblivious to his wife's sorrow and foreboding.

## GENERAL COMMENTS

Henry Handel Richardson, a doctor's daughter, was born in Melbourne, educated there and in Germany, where she studied music, and after her marriage lived in London until her death in 1946. Although she returned to her native land only on a brief visit, she is considered by many critics to be one of the greatest Australian novelists, largely on account of her famous trilogy, *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*, of which *Australia Felix*, published in 1917, is Volume One.

She had already written two other novels, one set in Leipzig (Germany) about music students such as she had been, and the other about her girlhood in Melbourne, but neither of these had made much stir in the literary world. Nor did *Australia Felix* and the following volume of the trilogy. Only when the third volume of *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* was published in 1929 did she become famous. Neither of the first two volumes gives the impression of being complete in itself. It would undoubtedly have been a good thing if the author had waited to complete all three volumes before publication, but it would certainly have been difficult, as the whole trilogy took fifteen years to write. Many critics rank it with such famous nineteenth century Russian novels as Tolstoi's *Anna Karenina* for its remarkable character study. The author most often compared with Henry Handel Richardson in English literature is George Eliot, also a woman writer, of the nineteenth century, whose books, *Silas Marner*, *The Mill on the Floss* and *Adam Bede* you have most probably read.

Henry Handel Richardson, as her choice of a man's name shows, preferred to be anonymous and avoided literary

publicity. She was reasonably well-off financially and could afford to work slowly, in solitude and with artistic integrity. By nature she was tough and reticent, devoted to her literary art. When she started to write this book, she was already over forty, with her ideas of life clearly defined, and had seriously studied the novel form in literature. Her way of writing is characteristic of many of the great writers of the period at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. Tolstoi, Galsworthy, Bennett, to mention a few you will know of, all worked as she did, with objective detachment towards their characters, yet basing their work on real people and incidents, set in background familiar in their own lives.

In this way she is an autobiographical author, just as Dickens was. Most of her characters are based on people she knew in her youth; the world she creates is rooted in verifiable fact and linked closely to her own or her family's experience. She invents little, but adapts fact until it becomes fiction, seeing all the events she describes through the eyes of the characters in her novel; in the case of *Australia Felix* through the eyes of the hero, Richard Mahony.

Her great powers of observation, her deep humanity, her memory stored with detail of the generation just previous to her own, and her singleness of purpose make her, in this novel and the two volumes that follow it, a novelist comparable in style, outlook and understanding, to Thomas Hardy. She writes like a man, without sentimentality, in a plain, forceful style, deliberately sacrificing breadth of outlook to depth and intensity. One critic called her trilogy "a Victorian type of novel with a modern attitude of mind", by which he probably meant that the setting, the conventions, and the behaviour of the characters belong to the nineteenth century, but the author's understanding of the people she portrays is based on a knowledge, not only of psychology, but also of modern psychiatry. This particularly applies to her study of Richard Mahony.

To understand fully her great power as a writer and to appreciate the tremendous scope of her character study, one should read all three volumes of the trilogy, *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*, and I hope that your class study of *Australia Felix*, which is Volume One, may lead you to be interested in following the fate of its hero to the end in Volume Three, because this trilogy is one of the greatest books in Australian literature.

*Australia Felix* was the novel that some singularly undiscerning critic called, on its first publication in 1917, "a dull chronicle, written apparently by a retired grocer." That critic must surely have hidden his head in shame a few years later! He might more truly have called it the tragic story of a man totally unable to come to terms with life, who carried the seeds of his destruction within his own character, just as the

hero of a Shakespearean tragedy does. The whole purpose of the book is to show Richard Mahony's ineffectual struggles to adapt himself to his environment.

The book is a chronicle, divided into four parts, introduced by a rather strange preface. There are no artificially contrived complications; there is no villain; the action mounts by a clearly definable series of steps to a climax, by means of purely natural developments, springing from Mahony's character. Everything is seen through his eyes, or, to provide necessary contrast, through the eyes of his wife, Mary. Character is the keynote of the book; incident is important only in so far as it is related to character. The purpose of the book could not be called didactic, because the author obviously does not believe that a man can change his own character. Like Hardy, in his tragic Wessex novels, this author looks on at the sad spectacle of a man struggling against his fate, and records it ironically and dispassionately.

The strong, forceful opening of the book introduces the ugly background of the early part of the story, the Ballarat gold diggings in the 1850's. Its first paragraph is horrifying in the stark realism of language it employs to describe the accident in which a young miner is buried alive. "The digger fell forward on his face, his ribs jammed across his pick, his arms pinned to his sides, nose and mouth pressed into the sticky mud as into a mask; and over his defenceless body, with a roar that burst his ear-drums, broke stupendous masses of earth." There are only three adjectives in this paragraph, but it imprints itself on the mind as clearly as if one were present at the disaster in reality. The dead miner plays no part in the story; Long Jim, who sees the accident, is a minor character only, but it could be that the author intends this appalling incident to offer a mystical parallel with her hero's mental struggles for adjustment. On the other hand, it is possible to regard it merely as a horrifying introduction to the background of strife and ugliness in which the book is set.

Part One of the book covers the period of Richard Mahony's life from his first years in Ballarat as a store-keeper on the diggings to his bringing home Mary Turnham as his sixteen-year-old wife. We see already his restlessness and dissatisfaction with his situation in life and with his uncouth neighbours, his rather condescending friendship with Purdy Smith, and, already clearly developed, all the facets of his character which will later bring about his downfall. These are his moodiness, introspection, sensitivity, his pride and his tactlessness. The author carefully illustrates these qualities of character by appropriate incidents, so that a clearly defined picture of Mahony grows up in the reader's mind. The whole of the action has some bearing on the character of Richard Mahony. At this stage of his life

Polly is subservient to him entirely, and her sweetness and compliant nature are stressed in their early relationship. She is his innocent, shy sweetheart and child-wife.

Part Two covers their early married life at the store, and shows Polly adapting herself to fit in with Richard's interests and character, whilst he finds her family and friends completely incompatible. He copes well with an emergency such as John Turnham's behaviour after his wife's death, but is incapable of the sustained effort required to endure the sordid details of his own everyday life at the store. At this stage Polly begins her gentle management of his affairs unobtrusively and persuades him to set up a medical practice, and we see clearly illustrated his habit of taking the line of least resistance, and begin to realise that Polly's is, after all, the stronger character of the two, in spite of her extreme youth. A great part of the realism of the book depends on the clear way in which the characters grow and develop under the reader's eyes. We see in this section also the precarious financial situation, brought about largely by his lack of commonsense, which is to haunt Mahony all his life.

Part Three presents us with a picture of Mahony's growing prosperity, due in great part to his wife's tact and friendliness and practical good sense. At the same time the tension between them, caused by her excessive hospitality and devotion to her friends and family, who all get on his nerves, becomes apparent. Purdy Smith, who will later provide the climax of the story, is reintroduced into the family circle, and the section ends with Richard's windfall of £2,000.

The fourth section begins with Mahony's greatest height of prosperity, which coincides with the growth and development of Ballarat. His dissatisfaction with the vulgarity of his money-grubbing neighbours reaches a climax at the musical party, which is followed immediately by the important conversation with Mr Tangye, the unhappy and introspective chemist, who puts into words all Richard's own distaste for the country, its inhabitants, and his own daily life.

From this point onwards, minor inconveniences and adversities, all occasioned by the same faults in Mahony's character, accumulate: the desertion of Long Jim and Ned, the disloyalty of Purdy, culminating in the quarrel with Mary. All these unpleasant happenings are followed by his sunstroke and desperate illness, indirectly due to his lack of commonsense. Here we arrive at the turning point of the action of the novel, where Mary begins to doubt her husband's wisdom and to treat him almost as a child to be humoured.

The final disaster arises from Richard's tactlessness in telling Henry Ocock the truth about his wife's illness, and from that point to the end of the book his return to England becomes inevitable. The reader is given the impression that out of a

morbid and deliberate turning of his back upon the realities of life Mahony wilfully destroys his career, when this need not have happened.

So it can be seen that a very clear plan dominates the book, giving it the vital strength that makes it great writing. Tension is created immediately in the opening paragraphs, atmosphere is established at once, and the pace of the narrative rapidly increases as Mahony's character is unfolded. Because both background and action are presented always from the point of view of the main character, the book has both unity and clarity. At the same time one is left with a feeling that the story is unfinished, and that the following two volumes of the trilogy are essential to a complete understanding of the author's aim. This no doubt accounted for the book's lack of success on its first publication.

Although this author does not, as many Australian writers do, always limit herself to the Australian scene, she does use her girlhood in Victoria and her own family history as a background for this particular novel. Many of the characters are drawn very closely from life, the astounding thing being that the author is able to take such an objective and unsentimental view of the intimate experiences of her own family.

Richard Mahony's character and career are certainly based very closely upon her knowledge of her father, who was married in Geelong in 1855. The description of Mahony's wedding and the honeymoon journey had its origin in fact. Although her father's tragedy was remote from her as a child, it had awakened her emotion and sympathy. His life in Ballarat, his marriage, his temporarily successful career, his dabbling in speculation, all appear in *Australia Felix*.

Mary Turnham is patterned on the author's mother, whose practical nature and lack of intellectual interests created the same situation with her husband in real life, as did Mary's with Mahony. John Turnham's character and career were obviously based on those of the author's uncle, John Bailey, who became a member of Parliament for Ballarat in 1859. She used his election speeches, his political papers, and his death from cancer (which occurs in the last volume of the trilogy). Henry Ocock, the not over-scrupulous lawyer, is patterned on an acquaintance of her father's.

The author's artistic integrity and anxiety to achieve a completely truthful picture of the Australian background caused her in 1912 to visit the country of her birth specially for this purpose. She read many old newspapers and family documents, old histories of Ballarat at the time of the gold diggings, visited small townships in the bush, made notes of the predominating features of the landscape between Geelong and Ballarat, and even measured rooms in the old house where her family had once lived. She intended that all the details of the generation

previous to her own, of which she would be writing, should be absolutely convincing. In the end, so closely did she interweave fact and fiction that she herself admits that she can hardly distinguish between them in the finished novel.

Only tremendous powers of observation and memory, together with a deep humanity and interest in people could have enabled her to achieve such clear analysis of character as she does. One critic of her book says that in it she truly "extended the frontiers of the novel." She certainly manages to impress the reader with a sense of the tragic grandeur of Richard Mahony's struggle against his own temperament and character. The knowledge that this was based on reality may give an added poignancy to the book for some readers.

Henry Handel Richardson has not been a popular author in her own country, in spite of her fame, probably because the picture of Australia she creates is by no means an attractive one, as far as the landscape itself and the way of life are concerned. But her main interest on this point was not so much to paint a complete background of the country and the people of the 1850's in the growing community in and around Ballarat as to present a picture of the pioneering colonists, seen through the eyes of one who formed a reluctant part of it. She was not interested in the historical value of the Ballarat diggings, or the political implications of the Eureka rebellion, or in the religious hypocrisy, the social distinctions, the corrupt electioneering campaigns of the colony in the Victorian era for their own sake, but only in so far as they react upon the mind and soul of Richard Mahony.

Nevertheless it is inevitable that this factual, historical background merges into a clear picture of an era, a generation behind the one in which the author was writing, a picture which gives added value and interest to the novel because it is of an Australia already faded into the past and too easily forgotten.

The position of women in the early days of the colony is very clearly suggested. Women like Mary, of the gentle and obedient type that the Victorians admired, struggled against the inadequacies and rawness of colonial life, bore the brunt of all its physical deficiencies and yet lived a happy, social life, full of domestic activities. Such a home as the miserable shack behind the store that even Mrs Beamish derided was the starting point for many a gentlewoman's married life.

The rawness of the colonial set-up is well illustrated in the rapid rise of people like the Ococks and the Devines, those "mean, grasping money-grubbers" that Richard so much despised. Gentility, as in the case of Agnes Glendinning and John Turnham's first wife, Emma, was founded, not on birth, but on money and position. Men like Henry Ocock and John Turnham, glib, suave place-seekers, opportunists, who rose on

the tide of events like the gold rush and the diggers' rebellion, became the men who controlled the colony.

Culture, even in the bigger cities like Melbourne, was hard to find. Mary's musical party, with its home-made, second-rate array of talent, was typical of the kind of amusement the country townships could offer. High fashion, typified in Zara's flat hat and hoops, seldom made its appearance, and, when it did, was imported from Melbourne, like Mary's pink satin boots for the Governor's ball.

Communication was still difficult. Mary's letters to Richard had to await hand delivery by some traveller; to stamp them was too expensive. Until the end of the book, when John Turnham became Minister of Railways and proudly donated free passes to his relatives, the spring cart, the gig and the coach had to suffice for any journeys Richard or Mary might make.

Justice was still a rough and ready commodity in short supply. Men like Henry Ocock and Grindle were no uncommon figures in the law courts. The police, struggling with the law-despising diggers, were little better themselves than the men they bullied. Drunkenness and corruption were rife. The incident of Glendinning's deliberate corruption of his young son offers an ugly peep behind the scenes of the country society. Boys of the age of Ned and Jerry, Tom and Johnnie Ocock, were exposed to all the corruptions of a lawless community. Small wonder that Richard, in a passionate self-justification of his desire to return to England, summed it up as a society of "men, eternally scheming to line their pockets, reckoning human progress solely in terms of L.S.D."

The brawling and physical violence, the ugliness and dirt, the grogshops of the diggings, dominate the first part of the book. Actual historical events provide the background: the diggers' meeting to demand the repeal of the hated licence tax, the miners' rebellious stand against the armed troopers at the Eureka Stockade, and the Ballarat election, with its torchlight procession, fireworks and orgies of drunkenness. Against this rip-roaring background of physical violence, Richard Mahony's fastidious personality struggled, ineffectively, to survive.

## THE CHARACTERS

### RICHARD MAHONY

It cannot be said too often that the character of Mahony is the be-all and end-all of the entire story. The author's treatment of it is on the grand scale. His was a character of great complexity, in which some of his finer qualities, such as his sensitivity and integrity, help to bring about his downfall, in the accepted tragic tradition. He is not an admirable or even a likable character, in spite of his easy generosity, his fine aspirations and his moral integrity. But he is a convincing and realistic figure who gradually arouses the reader's sympathy for

a man who cannot adapt himself to life, a man full of curious contradictions, sensitive, fastidious, a humane spectator of a community he despises, yet strangely deaf and blind to the calamitous impact of his own aloof personality on others. The root of his failure lies in his essential restlessness; as soon as a situation becomes stable he must seek to change it; he was not only discontented in Australia; he would be (and indeed was, later in the trilogy) unhappy anywhere in the world. He lived in a country of the mind, which had no contact with reality. The rough pioneering life of Ballarat threatened his refinement and brought out his most snobbish qualities, giving an impression of arrogance to his fastidiousness.

In this volume of the trilogy Mahony is shown as a weak, impulsive, undependable creature, full of generous feelings to all, but retreating from all contacts, a man of intelligence, who dabbles in the arts and sciences, but who lacks the common-sense to plan his own life, and drifts like a rudderless ship on the surface of events.

Now let us see how the author brings this intricate personality to life and how intimately all the incidents of the story are interwoven with the unfolding and development of Mahony's character.

His restlessness, his inability to build upon a situation so that he benefits by its development, is one of the growing signs of the ultimate disintegration of his brain which takes place in the latter part of the trilogy. It seems to come upon him whenever a situation becomes settled and allows him time to think. Even Purdy, an extrovert who notices little except the obvious, says to him, "If ever I knew a restless mortal, it's yourself," when Mahony accuses him of that same fault. The truth is that Purdy's restlessness was of the body; Mahony's of the mind. He blamed the unsettled life of a pioneer community for this fault in himself, but truly it lay deeper than anything external.

He always finds an excuse for this restlessness. When he suddenly decides that as soon as the baby is born, he will sell up and return to a practice in England, he tells himself it is because business is bad in the store, owing to the opposition he gave to the diggers' rebellion, and justifies his decision by assuring himself that, if he stays, his moral judgment and integrity will suffer from having to adapt his opinions to earn his daily living.

In the same way when he is left alone after the baby is born dead and Polly has gone to Geelong and Melbourne to recuperate, he rushes to spend the time that should have been devoted to the store in reading his old medical books, and blames the general excitement of the 1851 Great Exhibition for his having given up his medical career and left England.

Later, having taken up his medical career in Ballarat, at Polly's suggestion, instead of mixing with people so that his



availability as a doctor becomes known, he retreats into his surgery where he begins to study comparative religion and to try to "pierce the riddle of existence."

These moods of introspection that are so intimately bound up with Mahony's restlessness of spirit lead him into impulsive action, often lacking in all commonsense, so that, at the height of his success in the growing Ballarat community it only needs the bitter complaints of Mr Tangye, the dissatisfied chemist met by chance on a moonlight walk, to convince him that he is as much a failure as the chemist, and must get away from the raw, pioneering life and harsh, blistering climate to "a cool, grey-green Irish day, with a wet wind blowing in from the sea." And when ill luck breaks in upon his prosperity after his quarrel with Purdy, and later with Henry Ocock, he throws up everything gained since the time of his marriage, heedless of his wife's sensible comment, "I never before heard of anyone throwing up a good income because he didn't like the scenery."

Closely allied to Mahony's restlessness is his impulsiveness. He has only to think of a course of action to take it, however lacking in commonsense it may be. Sometimes it works out satisfactorily, as in his sudden decision to marry Polly Turnham after meeting her only once, this being the luckiest shot in the dark he ever made in his life. But at other times the result is not so good. He rushed into resuming his medical career, putting himself into debt to the tune of £1,000, without fully comprehending the sustained effort he was going to be called upon to put forth in his new life. At the same time he bought a new house, without first ascertaining the price the land on which it stood was likely to fetch at some future date, if he left it unpurchased at the time. In the same way, some years later, when his practice becomes too heavy for him, he thinks of taking an assistant, without first considering the difficulties that may be involved, and when he has already admitted to himself that "there was work for two and money for one" in his practice. At the same time he plunges into the expense of building a new, larger, brick house.

Possibly the most outstanding example of his impulsiveness is his attitude towards Purdy after the incident with Mary at the ball, an attitude which seems to put an end to a friendship of many years, with no attempt at understanding, and which leads him into the quarrel with Mary that changes her whole future feeling towards him from the unquestioning admiration of a child-wife to a kind of maternal tolerance.

Shortly after this, in a despondent reaction following his quarrel with Henry Ocock over his wife's illness, he becomes moodily resentful of the monotony of his existence and, convinced that elsewhere life will have more to offer him, decides "to shake the dust of the country off his feet."

Mahony's restlessness and impulsiveness are closely linked with his lack of commonsense. His nature is quite unpractical; he has little real ambition, merely vague aspirations, and no sense of the value of money. His attitude over the affair of the lawsuit illustrates this. He does not use much commonsense over keeping Johnnie Ocock out of mischief, nor in his treatment of Henry Ocock, on whom his case depends. Over the store he shows even less sense; it is Polly who finally suggests to him that the lack of business is due to his attitude towards the diggers at the time of the rebellion. When he takes up his medical career again, he is completely unpractical in the matter of making himself known to possible patients and in making provision for payments of his quarterly debt. He makes no attempt to insure his life as Ocock had advised, nor to make certain that he has a title to the ground on which their house is built. All these mistakes he attributes to ill-luck, rather than his own folly. Then in his complete unworldliness he makes an enemy of Henry Ocock, a blunder which affects both his practice and his investments, and finally leads to his worst mistake of all, the decision to throw away his career.

And yet one cannot wholly condemn Mahony for his lack of worldly competence, for very often it springs from his spiritual integrity. The trouble is that his integrity is combined with tactlessness and a certain degree of arrogance in his judgment of other people. He despises Henry Ocock for his dishonest juggling with the law, and the Ballarat miners for what he considers their disloyalty to law and order, but in his contempt there is a good deal of self-righteousness.

That same self-righteousness goes hand in hand with his fastidiousness, sensitivity and refinement. All these are bound up with his pride. His first visit to Henry Ocock's office involves him in a wordy battle with Grindle, the clerk, when his dignity is affronted by a casual reception. He shows a similar indignantly arrogant reaction to John Turnham's admittedly offensive attitude on their first meeting to discuss Richard's engagement to Polly. Later, when a simple countryman, whose wife he has saved from death, offers him fifty pounds in gratitude, Mahony's reaction is insultingly arrogant, though he badly needs the money.

So many people are repugnant to his fastidious taste; the Beamish family, old Ocock (Henry's disreputable ex-convict father), the Ballarat diggers, Polly's sister Sara with her ridiculous airs and graces, and most of the guests at his wife's musical party, particularly the vulgar Devines. To a certain degree Mahony is a snob, who feels that his wife is lowering herself by her kindness to everyone she meets. His attitude towards the country of his exile is equally fastidious; he hated "the dirty, unpainted, weatherboard houses, the ramshackle fences and the higgledy-piggledy back yards, the straggling land-

scape with its untidy trees, the unrelieved ugliness of the colonial scene."

Much of this dislike of the people and places around him grew out of his habit of introspection. He was aloof by nature from the hurly-burly of life. Privacy was essential to him. "To be perpetually in the company of other people irked him beyond belief. A certain amount of privacy was as vital to him as sleep." Hence the constant stream of Polly's friends and relations, with none of whom he had anything in common, continually irritated him. When Polly went to Melbourne after her confinement, he was delighted to be alone, rid of Mrs Beamish's vulgarity. After his wife's noisy musical party he escaped to the edge of the bush, lost in contemplation. Again, when Polly went to Melbourne, to help with John's wedding, he retreated happily into his study to spend all his spare time reading, "with his unsociable leanings towards a hermit's cell and his genuine need of privacy and silence." After his quarrel with Purdy and with Henry Ocock, an introspective moodiness descends upon him, in which he feels he can trust no one and convinces himself that the only remedy is to return to England.

His lack of understanding towards other people grows out of this introspection; he is not so much selfish as self-centred in his interests, and therefore unnoticing of other people's reactions, or becoming aware of them too late. It is typical of him to be unaware of Polly's discomfort on their honeymoon journey back to Ballarat, or her distress at the miserable shanty which is to be her home. Similarly he is late in realising that what Mr Tangye wants in their conversation after the musical party is sympathy, not argument. It is Polly who points out to him why the business in the store falls off after his opposition to the diggers' rebellion; he is quite unaware of having offended them, and is in any case indifferent to their opinions. It is Richard's indifference to his efforts to please that finally causes Long Jim to leave their employment: "You can slave your head off for him, and 'e never notices a thing you do," the old man says bitterly. Ned deserts his family and leaves Ballarat, largely because, as his wife Polly says: "Richard's treated 'im as if he was the dirt under 'is feet."

When Purdy's treachery breaks upon him like a cataclysm, Richard is incapable of understanding that it was partly his own fault, or of seeing Mary's point of view, that if he uses physical force on Purdy, it will merely draw more trouble upon her. He cannot understand why she had not warned him earlier of Purdy's folly or why she says: "I think of you and you think of no one but yourself." He has no real comprehension of what Mary is giving up when she agrees to accompany him to England, and is capable of saying to her, as the ship leaves the harbour: "Come on deck, my dear, and take your last look at the old place. It's not likely you'll ever see it again."

And yet he is capable of real generosity, as when he sends Purdy money for clothes to be best man at his wedding, or later, when, at his own expense, he brings back John's children and Sara, Polly's sister, to Ballarat, so that John may close his home and go away to get over his wife's death. Time and again he provides Ned and Jerry, Polly's brothers, with money and accepts them into his house. He buys Polly her longed-for piano, pays Long Jim's fare to and from England and sends five pounds to the Beamishes. But all these are impulsive gifts, often due to his pride, and made when it would have been wiser to pay his own debts with the money. They cost him nothing in patience or real understanding, which he is seldom capable of expending on other people.

In the same thoughtless way, he can occasionally rise to an emergency, as when he deals with John at the time of his wife's death, or with Polly's difficult confinement, or with John's election accident, and the many incidents when he is called out into the bush to give aid to desperate people. But all these are a part of his medical work, at which he is always competent. And, unfortunately, on most of these occasions he deals resentfully or tactlessly with the people concerned, giving nothing of his sympathy, merely his skill, and so often does himself harm by his very kindness.

This, then, is Richard Mahony, a man doomed to unhappiness, who is at home in no country, a man to whom the world proves an alien, hostile place, because of the quality of sterile self-destruction rooted within himself. In the author's hands he becomes a living, significant figure, based largely on the character of her own father, but real, not so much because of that, as because the author's deep penetration of his mind presents to us with convincing detail all the inconsistencies which make him, not a good or a bad man, but a tragic one.

### MARY (POLLY TURNHAM)

Mary's character, like her husband's, emerges slowly, changing and developing as her life with Mahony moulds it and hardens it. When we first meet her, working for the Beamishes in Geelong, she is only sixteen years old, with something typically Victorian in her doe-like shyness and submission to her future husband's wishes. When we leave her at the end of *Australia Felix* she is already the forbearing woman of twenty-nine, whose increasingly maternal attitude towards her husband makes it possible for her to tolerate his vagaries, without despising the character that produces them.

In character and temperament she is the antithesis of her husband, with a natural buoyancy that helps her to endure his moodiness. Sociable, friendly, utterly lacking in any introspective quality, she is always at ease in her environment, whether it be the Beamishes' rowdy home or her own overcrowded house in

Ballarat. Throughout the book she adapts herself to Richard, unaware of how often her practical, generous, kindly nature offends his sensibilities. Many times her native shrewdness saves him from disaster, guiding his decision towards more sensible action than he himself was capable of undertaking alone, but only after the incident at the ball does she begin to question her husband's wisdom, and even when she disapproves, as in the case of their return to England, she remains loyal to her early acceptance of him as the head of the household.

The book is in many ways an analysis, not only of Mahony's character, but of the relationship between himself and his wife. This relationship is accepted by the reader as more important than the historical and social events which take place. In every way Mary is a contrast to her foolish husband, and we pity her, tied by love to someone who remains to her throughout their whole married life an enigma she can never solve.

Mary's practical, shrewd commonsense stands out in clear contrast to her husband's lack of it. Richard himself can appreciate and even applaud it on occasion, as when, not long after their marriage, she saves a neighbour's child from choking to death by her prompt action. "Polly had a dash of native shrewdness, which he prized." He is not always so much aware of the many times she applies it to his own problems, as when she persuades him to borrow money on her brother John's security and set up a medical practice in Ballarat, instead of returning to England. There are times when she uses her commonsense to save him from discomfort, irritation, or folly, for example, when she decides that Mrs Beamish, whom he thoroughly dislikes, must never be invited again, and the occasion when she drags him out of his fool's paradise of reading to remind him that the house mortgage is due; again, when he decides impulsively to take a partner, a most unsuitable man called Wakefield, she points out the objections very forcibly. Often, too, she points out the sensible course of duty, when his moods would have ignored it, as for example when Henry Ocock requests a visit after the musical party. Without Mary Richard's practice would never have grown to the size it did, but his final mistake she is unable to correct. She sees clearly the simple and tactful methods it would have been possible to use to suggest to Henry Ocock that his wife was drinking, and even more clearly she sees the futility of throwing up a successful career because of a few setbacks, but on these two points she fails to convince her husband.

Fortunately Mary has a philosophical outlook which enables her to accept the inevitable gracefully. She has a resilience and buoyancy in the face of disaster. We see it first in the death of her baby. "Poor little baby, I should have been very fond of it," was all she said; and again, when she is sadly packing

Trottie's clothes to return the child to John Turnham, in reply to her husband's: "You should have had one of your own, wife," she only comments: "If it can't be, it can't be." She makes the best of her brother Ned's foolish marriage and does all she can to help Mrs Ned, just as she accepts her sister Zara's affected behaviour and tries to see her good points. And even after Purdy's disloyalty she consoles herself that her friends would never consider her in any way to blame.

This gentle philosophy grew naturally out of her sympathetic and kindly nature. It was so easy for her to see and bring out the best in other people that she assumed they would see the best in her. When she feels ill herself, awaiting the birth of her baby in the stuffy little shack behind the store, she can still be sorry for her brother John and his motherless children, and can welcome Sarah and the children to her home. She brings out the best in her boastful, ne'er-do-well brother, Ned, and mothers the bewildered newcomer, her youngest brother, Jerry. Everybody appeals to her sympathy; Long Jim, grumbling from morning till night, the terrified Mrs Glendinning, the vulgar Tilly, accepting Old Ocock because she can't have Purdy Smith, Miss Amelia sailing from England to housekeep for her father, only to find him already remarried, and Ned's deserted wife Polly, attacking Richard's arrogance with angry words. For Purdy, throwing away friendship by his foolish infatuation for her, and for her own dissatisfied, unhappy Richard she feels the same troubled sympathy, anxious to help, even where she does not understand.

This attitude, so characteristic of Mary, springs from her love of people. By nature she is sociable and friendly, gay and light-hearted. She loves to be surrounded by friends and relations for whom she can expend herself in kindnesses. She has no feeling, as Richard has, that in working for them she is belittling herself, and her reward comes when Richard has sunstroke and all her friends flock to help her, and again in the sadness of departure from Australia, when they all rally to say goodbye. One of Mary's happiest times was at the musical party, with all her friends gathered round her enjoying themselves.

She asked very little of life to make her gay and happy. The play to which her brother John took her at election time delighted her; peeping through the keyhole with Purdy at Hempel's proposal to Zara put her into a frenzy of giggling. Sometimes her natural gaiety could even arouse the introspective Richard to an unaccustomed humour, as on the occasion when she baked a perfect sponge-cake for Ned. When Tilly at the end of the book questions her about the difficulties of her alliance with someone so different in temperament from herself, she says vehemently, "I have been as happy as the day is long!"

That was her sincere opinion, based upon her absolute loyalty to her husband. Although at the end of their time in Ballarat she had begun to doubt his judgment, she never failed in loyalty. When she first met Richard he was like a god to her; "She thought him the kindest, handsomest and cleverest man in the world." "Richard himself loved this trait in her: her sterling loyalty." It bound her to her large family as well as to him and helped her to see only the good in them. Sometimes her loyalty to him was severely tried, but when he first broached the subject of returning to England, at the store, she could say: "I'll go with you wherever you go. My heart would always be where you are." Even at the end she could still say to Tilly, "I don't think it is right that I should pit my will against his." For her he was always, as she said to Zara, "the best husband in the world." She defended him against all criticism, from Long Jim, from Ned's Polly, from Tilly, from Mrs Beamish and from Purdy Smith; even to herself she excused his vagaries by saying that he was run down in health.

Under the surface shyness which she never outgrew (the girl who first appealed to his fastidious taste by fending off his kisses became the woman who could not warn him about Purdy's growing affection, because she was too modest to be sure it was true), Mary had undoubted strength of character. She had no great intellectual capacities, reading had no charms for her, Richard's delving into science and philosophy shocked her conventional beliefs; she had no cultural tastes and her piano-playing, though competent, distressed her musical husband. Her interests were domestic and social only. No greater contrast in character to Richard than his own wife could have been found, and this difference gives poignancy to the whole action of the novel.

### OTHER CHARACTERS

All other characters in the book are subordinate to Richard Mahony and his wife, and are seen only in relation to them. They are all real, consistently drawn and true to life, but they do not alter and develop as do the two main characters. They remain at the end as they are at the beginning of the book, people seen through Richard Mahony's eyes, who represent the rough types of a pioneering community which is alien and repulsive to him. They make a world, vital, teeming, expanding, in which he walks as a reluctant stranger.

### JOHN TURNHAM

Mary's eldest brother is one of the least likable characters in the book, a pompous, self-important, self-made business man, who later turned politician. He had no intention of cluttering up his career or spoiling his prospects by supporting or housing

his younger relatives, and allowed Mary to work for the vulgar Beamish family, and Ned and Jerry to fend for themselves on the diggings.

In spite of his susceptibility to adoring women like his first wife, Emma, and his second, Jinny Beamish, he was a cold-hearted man, who turned his back on his two children, Trottie and Johnnie, when their mother died, and looked upon his second wife, the uneducated Jinny, as a failure when she produced only daughters. He was domineering and heartless to his wayward, neglected son, Johnnie, and blind to the yearning for affection of little Trottie.

He was a possessive man who regarded his first wife as a beautiful "objet d'art" and whose sorrow at losing her was largely fury with fate at daring to interfere with his comfort. Mahony referred to the occasion of Emma's death as the time "on which John took the Almighty to task for having dared to interfere in his private life."

This egotistical streak appeared many times. When Emma was expecting her third baby he was thoroughly impatient with her moods, and when Mahony told him such moods had their natural uses, his answer was: "I am no great believer in nature. Nature needs to be coerced and improved."

He was always prepared to improve nature for his own benefit. His unwanted children were boarded out to Mary until his marriage to Jinny, when it pleased him to have Trottie back at home, regardless of the affection that had grown up between the little girl and her Aunt Mary. When Jinny died he would have been quite willing to foist her three little daughters upon Mary, had Richard not protested.

To his own son, Johnnie, he was invariably harsh and domineering, angry because the boy did badly at school. There was a mean streak in John Turnham that showed itself, not only in his attitude to his son, but also in his attitude to money. His sister Zara complained that over the housekeeping "John is as mean as dirt." He even allowed Richard Mahony to pay the fares of the two children and young Jerry from Melbourne to Ballarat after his wife's death, when the journey had been made specially to help him. A similar meanness showed in the way he made use of people: Mary to bring up his children; Zara, whom he disliked, to keep house for him; Richard to tout for votes amongst his patients at the election.

He was an ambitious man, who saw a political career as a way to the top in a new country. An eloquent speaker, with all the cheap tricks of oratory at his command, he made himself the diggers' champion, and paid lip-service to the requirements of the new country, which needed tough colonists to ensure its progress, though he himself lived luxuriously, having "married money."



The author draws a picture of an arrogant, successful man, whose apparent strength of character failed before any touch of adversity, such as his wife's death, and whom Richard Mahony saw as a symbol of the pushful grossness that was typical of the colony he despised.

#### HENRY OCOCK

The lawyer had much in common with John Turnham, the politician; the same ambition to succeed, the same cold-hearted meanness that used other people always for his own advantage; but his hypocrisy, unlike John Turnham's, was a conscious attitude, to enable him to get what he wanted easily. As Richard said: "the unctuous blandness, the sleek courtesy was but a mask which he wore for you just so long as you did not hinder him by getting in his way." His behaviour towards people depended always on whether he was getting his own way, or whether there would be some benefit in the affair for him. When Richard let Johnnie Ocock slip through his fingers just before the lawsuit, after Ocock had coached him in the lies that were to win them the suit, his real self soon showed, but when Richard came to him with John's security for the purchase of a house and practice, he was pleasant and friendly, and later suggested some excellent shares that Richard should invest his money in. When, however, the doctor tactlessly explained the illness of Henry's wife as being due to her addiction to drink, Ocock deliberately tried to wreck Richard's career.

A man who despised his father and ill-educated brothers, ne sought to make his way into society by means of his wife's money, at the same time meanly denying her small trifles that she needed. Agnes was so much afraid of his bullying and his meanness that she complained bitterly to Mary, and it was her fear of his annoyance with her pale face and lack of energy after her child's birth that drove her to drink.

But with all his faults Henry Ocock was a shrewd and clever lawyer. In his desire to succeed quickly, however, he acquired a bad reputation for undertaking all kinds of shady cases, and even John Turnham was shocked that Richard should have dealings with him. Purdy immediately recognised him as a "crafty devil" and Richard disliked him enough to refer to him in Mary's hearing as a "low mongrel."

Tilly hated him for his bullying ways with his own father, whom he would undoubtedly have cast off completely had he not hoped to inherit his money.

It was such people as Henry Ocock whom Richard had in mind when he despised his fellow colonists as "these hard, mean, grasping money-grubbers."

#### PURDY SMITH

There could have been no greater contrast in friends than that between Richard Mahony and Purdy Smith, yet the strange friendship persisted for many years, and when finally Purdy's

momentary disloyalty separated them, Richard was desolate. In Purdy the one person, other than his wife, that he had ever been intimate with to the extent of admitting him into his thoughts, passed out of his life.

Because their friendship was rooted in their Dublin childhood, when Mahony had first befriended the uneducated rough little English boy, Richard had always specially valued it, but the past meant little to Purdy. He lived always in the present. He was the complete extrovert, acting without thinking, "hail-fellow-well-met with all the world." He had little moral sense and few scruples and quite shamelessly took advantage of the older man's friendship. When the police troop chased him for his mining licence he headed for the store, knowing that Richard would go bail for him. When he was out of work, he returned to Richard's house in Ballarat, sure of a welcome, but at the end he had no scruples about trying to make love to Richard's wife, or about running away when Richard learnt of his folly.

Yet no one could dislike Purdy. He was still a boy, immature and uncontrolled, full of the joy of life, which he regarded as a gay adventure. He joined the Eureka Rebellion for fun, not from conviction. He drew the police off Long Jim's trail without thinking, in a sudden generous impulse, as he did most things. He was by nature a rolling stone, wild and unprincipled, but there was no deliberate evil in him.

He flirted and drank and enjoyed himself recklessly, but never truly wanted to settle down. Tilly was fun, until her intentions became too serious. "Oh, to be young," he said to Richard on the way to Geelong, "and to love the girls! To see their little waists and their shoulders and the dimples in their cheeks! To see how their little feet peep out when the wind blows their petticoats against their legs." It was Purdy's misfortune that his admiration for Mary turned so unexpectedly into something more serious than he could cope with.

Laughter was second nature to him, and boyish mischief and a noisy practical joke were the main part of his gaiety, which was one reason why Tilly in her girlhood appealed to him. Even Mary was lured by his lightheartedness into eavesdropping on old Hempel's ridiculous proposal to her sister Sara.

Yet beneath his lightheartedness Purdy had a native shrewdness which enabled him on a few moment's acquaintance to sum up Henry Ocock as a "crafty devil", which showed him the sort of speech the rebellious miners would appreciate, and which helped him to understand up to a point the complicated character of his friend Mahony, "the odd fish," for whom nevertheless he had a true affection.

#### MINOR CHARACTERS

In addition to John Turnham, Henry Ocock and Purdy Smith, who all contribute to the significant action of the story, a host

of minor characters spring to life within the book's pages. many of them partly drawn from life, all of them real to the reader. These characters, seen largely through the eyes of Richard Mahony, provide a background of colonial personalities which suggest the rough, raw life of the pioneer townships in the early 1850's.

The Beamish family, vulgar, well-meaning, uneducated and tough, provide a contrast which throws into relief Polly Turnham's reticence and modesty. Tilly's boisterous animal spirits and coarse good humour were no barrier to Polly, who saw beyond them to the essential kindness within, but Richard was repulsed and found Tilly a somewhat overpowering guest in his house. Nor could he bear to hear his wife using the affectionate term "mother" for the fat and vulgar Mrs Beamish, and after Polly's confinement was only too glad when financial worries called the elder woman back to Geelong. He considered the rundown family hotel which was their home and livelihood no place for a gently brought up girl like Polly. Jinny Beamish, on the other hand, far from being flamboyant like her sister, was so colourless and so uneducated that even Mary, always kindly in her judgments, felt that she was no wife for the proud and ambitious John Turnham, whose comment on his sister's gently spoken criticism was: "I raise my wife to my own station."

Equally loud and vulgar and outspoken in her criticism of Richard, of whose silent distaste she was fully aware, was Polly, Ned's slatternly wife. Slapdash and familiar, she was all that Richard Mahony most disliked, but even she, touchy as she was about being patronised, succumbed to Mary's friendliness and said once to Richard, "I vow your Mary's the kindest-hearted little soul it's ever been me luck to run across."

Old Ocock, Henry's father, who confessed to Richard to having been until very recently under Government surveillance, was another vulgar, harsh product of what was then a harsh land. He relieved his fear of Henry by bullying Tom and Johnnie, his two foolish younger sons, one of whom was almost mentally deficient and the other a drunkard. Despite their difference in age, he seemed to suit Tilly well enough as a husband, and, as their fortunes rose with the growth of Ballarat, she ruled the household of three men with autocratic delight at her good fortune.

The Devines, rising rapidly to a position of wealth in the township where he had once been Mary's vegetable man, were another couple whose gross vulgarity offended Richard's squeamish taste, but once again, Mary, inviting them to her musical party at John Turnham's insistence, and sorry for the fat, ill-dressed, elderly woman whom the others scorned, made a life-long friend by her kindness.

At the other end of the social scale from these rather uncouth colonists were the refined and would-be fashionable ladies, like Mrs Glendinning and Mrs Urquhart, whose husbands were station owners or managers. Agnes Glendinning is pictured as a pretty, useless bit of femininity who had the folly or the misfortune to follow one brutal husband with a second. To the unsophisticated Mary she represented the acme of fashionable society, and her superficial friendship made the younger girl feel of growing importance in the little world of Ballarat. But even Mary, always slow to condemn, saw that the tragic situation of Agnes' first marriage was in part due to her own weakness and folly.

Mary's sister, Sarah, whose name graduated through Sara to Zara as her fashionable follies increased, was so foolish a woman that her portrait almost turns to caricature. Her affected behaviour and exaggerated fastidiousness emphasised the false type of education that passed for the real thing amongst the simple colonists, who wished to improve their social position. Zara's flat hat which replaced the conventional bonnet, her set of hoops to wear beneath her petticoats, caused a flutter amongst the fashion-conscious ladies of Ballarat, but her silly, flirtatious ways and affected mannerisms amused Purdy and irritated Richard and John Turnham. Of worthwhile feminine qualities she had very few; her housekeeping was slovenly and incompetent, her ability to manage children non-existent, though Mary was always impressed by her scholastic claims and assured Richard that she would accept only the very best and highest paid jobs as a governess.

When one considers the ridiculous Zara, the boastful, discontented Ned and the arrogant John Turnham, their sister Mary's character seems all the finer by contrast.

Other less important characters — Miss Amelia Ocock who married the unpleasant Grindle, her brother's clerk, rather than remain a spinster, Long Jim, the constantly grumbling old derelict who becomes a pensioner on Richard's charity, the consumptive Hempel, Archdeacon Long and Jerry, Mary's youngest brother — all help to fill up the colonial scene. All of them serve to make the Ballarat community a living background to the story of Richard Mahony and his wife. We do not see them as full personalities, and we know only that part of their lives that intertwines with Richard Mahony's.

## STYLE

One critic has said of this book that its style is like shorthand. This is simplifying its characteristics too much, but certainly Henry Handel Richardson writes plainly, concisely and factually. She does not describe for describing's sake, but when she does give word pictures of places and people that are essential for

the reader's full comprehension of situation and character, she writes with detailed observation and no sentimentality. Apart from the occasional sardonic flavour of Richard Mahony's reflections, there is little indication of any sense of humour, except perhaps in the descriptions of some of the rather vulgar characters like Tilly Beamish and Mrs Devine. But these are mere flickers in a book that is predominantly a serious, almost philosophical, study of the faults in a good man's character.

The general picture that emerges is of a grim and implacable continent. The drab and melancholy tone of the bush background is relieved only by the crude roughness of the human element that the diggers and their pioneering families provide.

The words she uses are virile, the imagery fresh and compelling, bringing to life a visual picture in the reader's mind, as when Long Jim at the beginning of the book longs for the old days in London: "He remembered the glowing charcoal in the stoves of the chestnut and potato sellers; the appetising smell of the cooked-fish shops; the fragrant steam of the hot, dark coffee at the twopenny stall, when he had turned shivering out of bed; he sighed for the lights and jollity of the 'Hare and Hounds' on a Saturday night." Using adjectives sparingly but well, she manages to convey an atmosphere in a minimum of words, as in her first description of the Ballarat diggings: "Under a sky so pure and luminous that it seemed like a thinly drawn veil of blueness, which ought to have been transparent, stretched what, from a short way off, resembled a desert of pale clay. No patch of green offered rest to the eye; not a tree, hardly a stunted bush had been left standing, either on the bottom of the vast, shallow basin itself, or on the several hillocks that dotted and formed its sides. Even the most prominent of these, the Black Hill, which jutted out of the Flat like a gigantic tumulus, had been stripped of its dense timber, feverishly disembowelled, and was now become a bald protuberance strewn with gravel and clay."

## DESCRIPTION

### PLACES

The best of the author's descriptive power is very naturally to be found in her pictures of the places that make up the background and atmosphere of the story. The reader's introduction to the Ballarat diggings is made in a passage typical of her method of emphasising a single idea to create atmosphere: "There was water everywhere. From the spurs and gullies round about, the autumn rains had poured freely down on the Flat; river and creeks had been over their banks; and such narrow ground-space as remained between the thick-sown tents, the myriads of holes that abutted one on another, jealous of every

inch of space, had become a trough of mud. Water meandered over this mud, or carved its way in channels; it lay about in puddles, thick and dark as coffee-grounds; it filled abandoned shallow holes to the brim."

A later glimpse of the pioneer town in its early days, seen when Richard looked back upon it as he set off through the bush for Melbourne, indicates how clearly in a few words she can create a picture: "There it lay—the scattered, yet congested, unlovely wood and canvas settlement that was Ballarat. At this distance, and from this height, it resembled nothing so much as a collection of child's bricks, tossed out at random over the ground, the low, square huts and cabins that composed it being all of a shape and a size."

As the township grows and spreads we are given further peeps at it, all emphasising its crudity, its ugliness, and the devastating summer heat that made it so unbearable to Richard Mahony: "Summer had come round again, and the motionless white heat of December lay heavy on the place. The low little houses seemed to cower beneath it; and the smoke from their chimneys drew black, perpendicular lines on the pale sky. If it was a misery at this season to traverse the blazing, dusty roads, it was almost worse to be within doors, where the thin, wooden walls were powerless to keep out the heat, and flies and mosquitoes raged in chorus."

Everything is described as seen through Richard Mahony's eyes, even the hotel dining room at John Turnham's election party. "The table of the public dining-room was disorderly with the remains of a liberal meal; napkins lay crushed and flung down among plates piled high with empty nutshells; the cloth was wine-stained, and bestrewn with ashes and breadcrumbs, the air heady with fumes of tobacco. Those of the guests who still lingered at the table had pushed their chairs back or askew, and sat, some a-straddle, some even with their feet on the cloth."

The author has a way of making some individual scene characteristic of the whole early colonial way of life, for instance in her description of the Mahonys' second home in West Ballarat: "By the time he had finished with it, it was one of those characteristically Australian houses which, added to wherever feasible, without a thought for symmetry or design—a room built on here, a covered passage there, a bathroom thrown out in an unexpected corner, with odd steps up and down—have yet a spacious, straggling comfort all their own."

Always there is an insistence on the merciless heat that played so great a part in finally driving Richard Mahony back to England: "The hot airless night had become the hot, airless day; in the garden the leaves on trees and shrubs drooped as under an invisible weight. All the stale smells of the day before persisted—that of the medicaments on the shelves, of the

unwetted dust on the roads, the sickly odour of malt from a neighbouring brewery. The blowflies buzzed about the ceiling; on the table under the lamp a dozen or more moths lay singed and dead."

A similar picture is put before us after Mahony's illness as he dragged himself through the routine of his daily work: "Since his sunstroke he not only hated, he feared the sun. But out into it he must, to drive through dust-clouds so opaque that one could only draw rein till they subsided, meanwhile holloaing off collisions. Under the close leather hood he sat and stifled; or, removing his green goggles for the fiftieth time, climbed down to enter yet another baked wooden house, where he handled bodies rank with sweat, or prescribed for pallid and fever-bespeckled children."

He summed up the whole dreary ugliness of the colonial scene, when he strove to win Mary's agreement to their departure: "His eyes ached, his brows had grown wrinkled from gazing on iron roofs set against the hard blue overhead; on dirty weather-boards innocent of paint; on higgledy-piggledy backyards and ramshackle fences; on the straggling landscape with its untidy trees."

Melbourne in its early days was little improvement on Ballarat, merely larger, and in Richard Mahony's mind was closely allied to the corruption of its legal system. His first view of it was of a place, half town, half country, struggling to be born. "Massive erections of freestone were going up alongside here a primitive, canvas-fronted dwelling, there one formed wholly of galvanised iron. Fashionable shops, two storeys high, stood next tiny, dilapidated weather-boards. In the roadway, handsome chaises, landaus, four-in-hands, made room for bullock teams, eight and ten strong; for tumbrils carrying water or refuse—or worse; for droves of cattle, mobs of wild colts bound for auction. Stock-riders and bull-punchers rubbed shoulders with elegants in skirted coats."

A later view, as he went to the court for the hearing of his lawsuit, was more unpleasant still: "The sun was a yellow blotch in a copper sky; the thermometer had leapt to a hundred and ten in the shade; blinding clouds of coarse, gritty dust swept house-high through the streets. . . . Outside those public houses that advertised ice, crowds stood, waiting their turn of entry; while half-naked barmen, their linen trousers drenched with sweat, worked like niggers to mix drinks which should quench these bottomless thirsts."

Contrasted with such pictures were the memories in Mahony's mind of the English and Irish landscape he had left behind, dreams that undermined his attempts to settle in cruder, newer surroundings. He pictured to Polly "a little, gabled, red-roofed house at the foot of some Sussex down, with fruit trees and a

high hedge round it, and only the oast houses peeping over." Or "white roads that were banked with primroses and ran head-long down to the sea . . . or a down on a Spring morning, when the air was alive with larks carolling." Or he bedevilled himself with memories of "a cool, grey-green Irish day, with a wet wind blowing in from the sea."

Not only Melbourne and Ballarat in the early days of their growth are pictured for us through Mahony's eyes, but also the monotony and the vastness of the bush landscape. As he rode out with Purdy Smith from Ballarat on his holiday visit to Melbourne at the beginning of the story, "from the top of these ridges the view was a far one; you looked straight across undulating waves of country and intervening forest-land, to where, on the horizon, a long, low, sprawling range of hills lay blue—cobalt blue, and painted in with a sure brush—against the porcelain-blue of the sky." "He let his eye roam unlovingly over the wild, sad-coloured landscape, with its skimpy, sad-coloured trees." But at that time the bush held no sinister implications for him beyond its loneliness. In fact, as he rode back with his girl-wife, the Spring flowers seemed to promise a golden future. "It was the time of flowers—of fierce, young growth after the fruitful winter rains. . . . On damp and marshy ground wattles were aflame; great quivering masses of softest gold. Wherever these trees stood, the fragrance of their yellow puff-balls saturated the air; one knew, before one saw them, that they were coming; and long after they had been left behind, one carried their honeyed sweetness with one." Only later, as he began to rebel against its power to hold him prisoner, did Mahony become conscious of the silent threat of the bush: "Here went no one but himself. He and the mare were the sole living creatures in what, for its stillness, might have been a painted landscape. Not a breath of air stirred the weeping grey-green foliage of the gums; nor was there any bird-life to rustle the leaves, or peck, or chirrup. Did he draw rein, the silence was so intense that he could almost hear it."

The harsh sunlight was beginning to be an obsession: "There was something sinister in the dead stillness of the melancholy bush; in the harsh, merciless sunlight of the late afternoon." He hated it. "Dejectedly he drove, in fancy, along the glaring, treeless roads, inches deep in cinnamon-coloured dust. How one learnt to hate the sun out here!" The whole landscape offended him because it was so completely unlike England. "The train was running through mile after mile of flat, treeless country, liberally sprinkled with clumps of tussock grass, which at a distance could be mistaken for couched sheep. . . . Long, bare, red roads, straight as ruled lines, ran back into the heart of the burnt-up, faded country."



One element of the landscape which obviously impressed the author herself is referred to on many occasions, the wide Australian sky in all its various moods, sometimes gentle, "so pure and luminous that it seemed like a thinly drawn veil of blueness", or again, "the porcelain blue of the sky", or "the moon . . . stole, a misty ghost, across the dun-coloured sky" or "the sun shone in a gentian-blue sky", or "a pale azure sky, against which the distant hills looked purple; above these a narrow belt of cloud, touched, in its curves, to the same hue;" on other occasions threatening, "the tense, white sky", and "the sky . . . was hidden by a dense cloud, which came racing along like a giant bat with outspread wings, devouring the stars in its flight." Mahony's last memory of the colony is linked with the sky, as the ship leaves port, on "a fine, starry night, clear with the hard, cold radiance of the south."

### PEOPLE

It is never this author's intention to lay particular stress on the physical appearance of her characters, except in so far as that appearance indicates character. For this reason the reader is given only brief and occasional glimpses of external characteristics in which there is almost invariably some indication of the quality within.

For example, Mahony is referred to as a "tall, thin, fair, whiskered man peering disconsolately along a row of crowded carriages," a description which carries a hint of his physical frailty, combined with his perpetual sense of failure—here failure in such a minor kind of competence as finding a seat on the train. When he sailed for England he was shown to us as "a tall, thin figure, with an eager, pointed face and hair just greying at the temples," a reminder of the spurts of optimism that eternally struggled with his habitual moodiness.

Polly is described as a "black-eyed slip of a girl with something of doe-like shyness" about her, and later, "above the pale wild-rose of her cheeks her black eyes danced with a mischievous glee;" these two references giving the reader a clear indication of her gentleness and natural gaiety.

The book contains many such vignettes of characters of lesser importance; Long Jim, "the tears coursing ruts down cheeks scabby with yellow mud," Grindle with his "mop of flaming red hair and small-slit white-lashed eyes," and Johnnie Ocock, "a lean, pimply-faced youth, with cold, flabby hands."

Hempel had a "smooth servility of manner," and was "the shopkeeper, par excellence;" Tilly, who came to Ballarat "with her hair all towsy-wowsy in the wind" and frightened Purdy Smith by her relentless pursuit of him, became later "a stout, high-coloured woman with a roar of a laugh, full yet firm lips and the whitest of teeth." Jinny, her sister, is pictured most characteristically "in the generous, wide-lapped pose of some old

Madonna." Miss Amelia Ocock, that frightened spinster from England, was "a gentle, little elderly body, with a harmless smile and a prominent jaw;" Ned's wife, Polly, always untidy, "wore a slatternly wrapper, and her hair was thrust unbrushed into its net;" Mrs Devine sat "unfortunately perched on the ottoman in the middle of the room, purple, shiny and beaming, two hot, fat, red hands clasped over her stomach."

Such glimpses, conveyed with a paucity of language and an observant eye, remain easily in the memory and help the portrait gallery of Ballarat personalities to come to life.

### INCIDENTS

Most of the happenings in the story, ordinary enough in themselves, are described to the reader simply and clearly, very largely through the medium of dialogue or the characters' thoughts and reactions. But here and there incidents which have a special significance in the story are related in a particularly vivid way, so that a picture of what was happening makes a clear impact on the reader's mind. Such an incident occurs when Purdy Smith first appears, running to Richard Mahony for his assistance, as he tries to escape the pursuing soldiers: "Once he fell, but, enlirmed from head to foot, wringing wet and hatless, was up again in a twinkling. His enemies were less sure-footed than he, and times without number measured their lengths on the oily ground." The rapid account of Mary's preparations for the party gives us a good idea of her happy domestic competence: "Mary herself had only time to snatch a bite standing. From early morning on, tied up in a voluminous apron, she was cooking in the kitchen, very hot and floury and preoccupied, drawing grating shelves out of the oven, greasing tins and patty pans, dredging flour. The click-clack of egg-beating resounded continuously; the mountains of sponge cakes of all shapes and sizes rose under her hands." The quick-fire wording of the description of Richard's sunstroke shows us the author's way of conveying a climax to the action. "He put both his hands to his top-heavy head, to support it; and in a blind fit of vertigo all but lost his balance in the saddle; the trees spun round, the distance went black. For a second still he kept upright; then he flopped to the ground, falling face downwards, his arms huddled under him."

An excellent description of the auction sale of Mary's precious furniture, by presenting the reader with a series of lively pictures, conveys the sadness of the break-up of her home, and indeed, from that moment onwards, of her life. "The actual sale was over, but the work of stripping the house only begun, and successful bidders were dragging off their spoils. His glass-fronted bookcase had got as far as the surgery door. There it had stuck fast; and an angry altercation was going on, how best to set it free. A woman passed him bearing Mary's girandoles; another

had the dining-room clock under her arm; a third trailed a what-not behind her. To the palings and the fence several carts and buggies had been hitched and the horses were eating his neatly clipped hedge. . . . Voices echoed in hollow fashion through the naked rooms; men shouted and spat as they tugged heavy articles along the hall or bumped them down the stairs."

### IMAGERY

Much of the vividness of these impressions of places and people and incidents is achieved by means of unusual similes and metaphors, or by adjectives and verbs selected for their pictorial value.

Lights twinkle in Main Street, following its course "like a rope of fireflies;" moonlight spills over the hills "like milk;" the dead miners lie, "the blood gurgling from throat and breast like water from the neck of a bottle;" the swelling hills are "shaped like a woman's breasts." When the storm broke over Ballarat a dense cloud "came racing along like a giant bat with outspread wings, devouring the stars in its flight." The moonlight lay upon the hills "like a visible burden, flattening their contours." When the house was sold, men and women servants "fled, like rats from a doomed ship." As Richard Mahony leaned over the ship's rail, gazing into the "black and fathomless deep," it sent "crafty licking tongues up the vessel's side." On his journey to Melbourne the failing shadows of the horses' bodies in the western sun "were mounted on high spindle-legs."

The keen observation and the delicate discrimination in choice of words which such descriptions indicate are an important part of Henry Handel Richardson's integrity as an author; she wishes to keep as closely as possible to facts and at the same time to give those facts artistic significance.

### DIALOGUE

In this book there is an obvious divergence between the speech of the main characters, Mahony himself in particular, and the speech of the pioneers, who all use the vernacular.

Ill-educated folk, such as the Beamish family, the Ococks with the exception of Henry, the Devines, Ned's wife and Long Jim, drop the aspirate and speak quite ungrammatically; the diggers, including Purdy Smith, Ned and Jerry to a certain extent, all add vulgarities and oaths to their illiterate speech. Even the semi-educated, such as Grindle, speak coarsely. In this way most of the characters, except John Turnham, whose speech is characteristically pompous, are isolated from the two main people in the story, so that the impression is given of a world seen through Richard Mahony's eyes, continually offending against his fastidiousness.

Little attempt is made by the author to reproduce actual Australian idiom; in fact much of the vernacular is Cockney in origin to indicate the previous background of many of the colonists. Some, like Purdy, with his characteristic "O Lor!" are given phrases which seem to be part of them. In all cases the mode of speech, the vocabulary and the turn of phrase, are in keeping with each individual. In the case of Richard Mahony himself, much of his character explains itself to the reader in his introspective thoughts.

## EXERCISES

1. To what extent might this book be regarded as a chronicle of failure?

2. It is said that the author's aim was to present the pioneering community through the mind and senses of one who had formed a reluctant part of it. Did she succeed in this?

3. In what ways could Richard Mahony be considered a failure?

4. How does the author arouse our sympathy for Richard Mahony?

5. Mahony's tragedy is that his virtues, rather than his vices, cause his downfall. Discuss.

6. To what extent does the interest of this book lie in the analysis of the relationship between Richard and Mary?

7. Other characters in the book are important only in relation to Richard Mahony. Does the book suffer or gain from this?

8. Discuss the proposition that only the two main characters change and develop.

9. What part is played in the novel by the background of the Australian bush?

10. Could this novel have been as effective if set in the Australia of the author's own lifetime?

11. Compare and contrast the characters of Richard and Mary.

12. What sort of picture does the author give of the pioneering community in Ballarat?

13. What use is made by this author of actual historical background?

14. What use is made of (a) contrast, (b) variety, (c) physical appearance in characterisation?

15. What would you consider the true climax of the action, Mahony's quarrel with Purdy Smith or with Henry Ocock?

16. Point out the indications given throughout the book that Mahony's ultimate return to England is inevitable.

17. What were the aspects of Australian life that Mahony found so insupportable?

18. What use is made in this novel of (a) suspense, (b) conflict?

19. What qualities do the characters Henry Ocock and John Turnham have in common?

20. What part in the development of the plot is played by Purdy Smith?

21. What part did Mary's character and actions play in achieving Mahony's temporary success?

22. Compare the characters of Sarah Turnham and Tilly Beamish.

23. "Purdy's restlessness was of the body; Richard Mahony's of the mind." Discuss this statement.

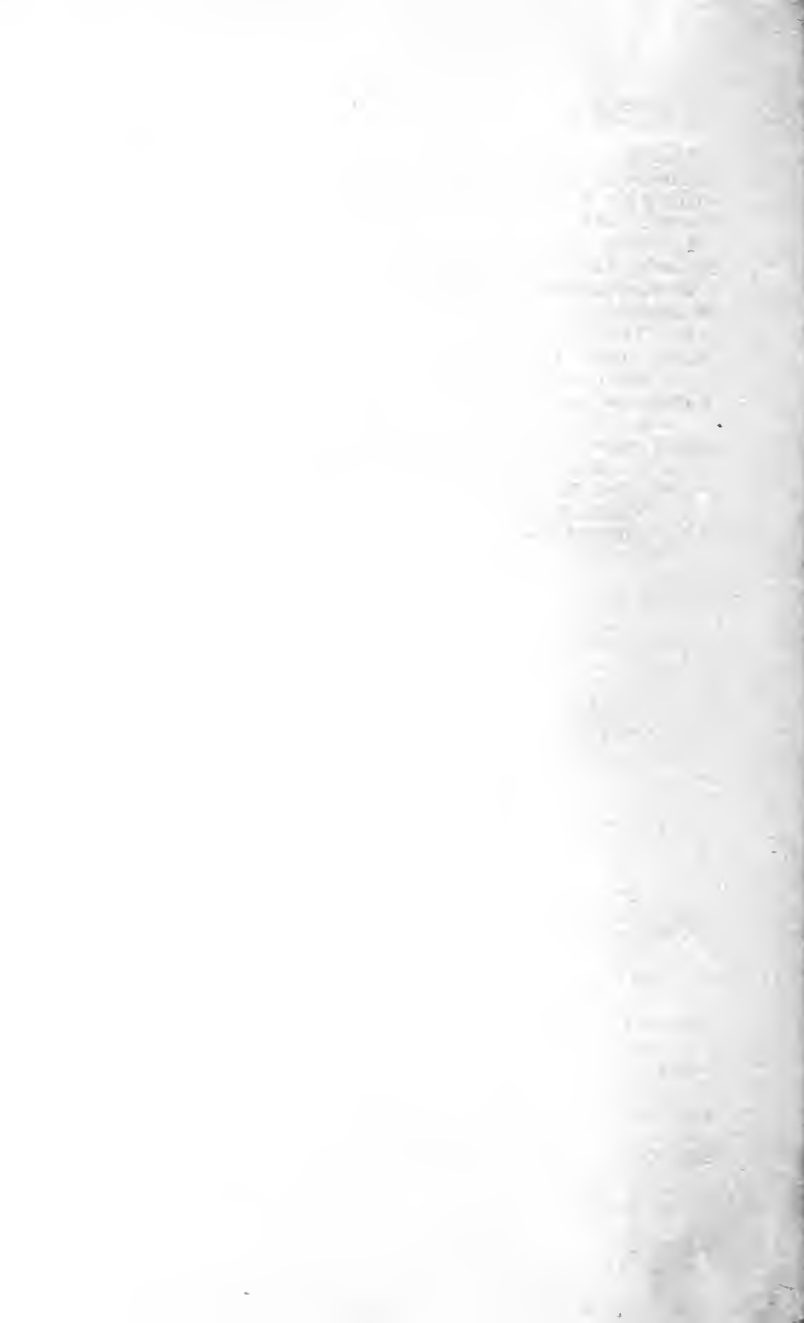
24. Which character in the book most claims your pity, Richard or Mary? Why?

25. In what ways do John Turnham, Henry Ocock and Purdy Smith contribute to the significant action of the story?

26. To what extent do (a) other people's actions, (b) external events, affect Mahony's fate?

27. Discuss the tragedy of Agnes Glendinning (later Ocock).

28. With what effectiveness is the curse of alcohol depicted?



## A PRIMITIVE INSTINCT

The emotion of anger was Nature's provision to help the lower creatures (and even primitive man) to cope with dangerous situations.

Among civilized people spontaneous and uncontrolled anger is a reversion to animal instinct. It destroys judgment, nullifies reason, and puts the mind into a sort of temporary insanity. Among groups based on race, religion, politics, nationality, etc., it goes hand in hand with hatred as the world's worst enemy of human happiness.

*Controlled* anger may sometimes serve a useful purpose in dealings with certain refractory types of people who are not responsible to any other treatment, but its use should be strictly limited.

The harm done by one outburst of anger may be irretrievable. It may cause enmity and rancour; it could destroy a lifelong friendship.

Unrestrained anger is one of the least admirable forms of selfishness.

## NOTES



## NOTES

UCSB LIBRARY

7-62257

NOTES



**A** 000 606 525 4

PRINTED BY WINN & CO. PTY. LTD.  
53-55 BALFOUR STREET  
CHIPPENDALE, SYDNEY